

The seal of the Department of the Interior, featuring a bison standing in a landscape with a rising sun in the background, all enclosed within a circular border with the text "DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR".

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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WOODCOCK POPULATIONS SHOW INCREASE

The status of the woodcock—one of the East coast's most highly prized game birds—at the start of the 1948 breeding season in the northeastern states was apparently the most favorable in several years, Albert M. Day, Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service announced today.

From Maine, Howard L. Mendall, leader of the Maine Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit at Orono, reports that a check made by cooperating observers in the heart of the woodcock nesting areas showed the number of occupied singing grounds this year to be more than 20 percent higher than last year.

The increase was heaviest in eastern Maine, in Vermont, and in New Hampshire. Little change in population was recorded in Connecticut and in southern and western Maine. Decreases were noted in Massachusetts and in central Maine. Reports received by the Service from Pennsylvania and New Jersey indicate the general upswing. The Maine figure, according to Mr. Mendall, record more woodcocks this spring than have been observed at any time during the past 12 years.

If such favorable reports continue to come in on the recovery of this species which is so popular among sportsmen along the Atlantic seaboard, the Service may find it possible to recommend a relaxation in hunting regulations on woodcock for the 1948-49 season, said Mr. Day.

Personnel of the Maine Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit have conducted a census of woodcock by the "singing ground count" method for periods varying from 5 to 12 years on six permanent census areas in eastern Maine.

Beginning in 1945, a considerable number of new census areas were established in various parts of the Northeast by cooperators who have reported their findings to the Maine Unit for combined tabulations. These were primarily in Maine, Vermont, and Connecticut, with a few in New Hampshire, Massachusetts and New York. The comparative data are becoming increasingly valuable each year, according to the Service.

The woodcock is primarily a bird of the eastern part of the country, nesting from southern Canada southward and concentrating in winter along the Gulf coast, chiefly in Louisiana and southwestern Mississippi.

During the winter of 1939 when the southern states had unusually cold weather, the woodcock and other shore birds suffered severe losses. Since that time the Fish and Wildlife Service has emphasized the need for special protection for these birds, through curtailed hunting seasons, because they do not have the recuperative possibilities of ducks and other game birds. Woodcocks usually lay only four eggs to the nest, whereas ducks lay two or three times this number. Like ducks, they raise only one brood a year.

The woodcock, or "timberdoodle", has long been known as the mystery game bird of the eastern United States because it has defied efforts of scientists who attempted to learn details of its life history, seasonal movements, and migration routes. Within the past decade investigators of the Maine and Pennsylvania Cooperative Wildlife Research Units have devised banding and censusing techniques that are now answering some of the questions which have puzzled observers for years. As a result management measures have been developed which have increased the woodcock populations on such areas as the Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge, near Calais, Maine. This refuge was established in 1937 primarily for the protection and preservation of the woodcock. These birds make that area their first landing point after crossing the Bay of Fundy during their southern migration from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

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